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AUTHOR Lieberman, Devorah A.; Campain, Robert F.
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ABSTRACT

Noting that teachers wishing to increase students' listening skills must focus on modification of specific causes of ineffective communication behavior rather than theorizing about generic symptoms, this paper describes a competency oriented approach for improving listening skills. The paper first provides a rationale for improving listening skills, and then describes development of a personal Student Listening Profile (SLP). The four stages of the SLP journal described by the paper consist of (1) identifying ineffective listening habits, (2) developing goals for improving listening skills, (3) developing behavioral objectives for eliminating the specific barriers identified, and (4) developing strategies for monitoring and reinforcing goal/objective-directed behavior. The paper includes methods for integrating the SLP with course activities and examples of journal entries for each phase of the SLP. Finally, the paper discusses the potential effects of this behavior-oriented approach on the improvement of students' listening skills as well as its contributions to the total communication process. (HTH)

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The Student Listening Profile:

A Vehicle for Modifying Listening Behavior

Devorah A. Lieberman and Robert F. Campain

University of Southwestern Louisiana

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Running head: THE STUDENT LISTENING PROFILE

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Abstract

A competency oriented approach for improving the listening skills of students enrolled in communication courses is outlined. The primary instrument utilized in the approach is a four phase Student Listening Profile (SLP), which involves having students identify listening behavior. Specific goals, behavioral objectives and facilitating techniques, designed and selected to eliminate or modify each of the listening barriers, are also included in the SLP. Methods for integrating the Student Listening Profile with course activities are suggested. Examples of journal entries for each phase of the SLP are also included. The potential effects of this behavior-oriented approach on the improvment of students' listening skills as well as contributions to the total communication process are discussed.

The Student Listening Profile:
A Vehicle for Modifying Listening Behavior

"Effective listening" courses are being adopted in communication curricula and inservice training programs across the nation (Wolff, 1979). A further indication of the newly discovered importance of the listening variable in the communication process is the organization of the International Listening Association which was chartered in 1979 to promote the study and development of effective listening (Wolff, Marsnick, Tacy & Nichols, 1983). The annual ILA convention attracts not only professionals from the communication field, but persons from all levels and areas of public education, psychology, speech pathology, and business. Listening courses are often designed to meet specific needs of business and education. Students, employers and employees generally need heightened awareness of the importance of listening as well as specific strategies for becoming effective listeners. Inefficient listening habits accrued throughout a person's life need to be identified and replaced with positive and productive listening skills.

The importance of improved listening skills has become a frequent theme in current communication literature. Galvin (1984) suggested that listening skills are critical to effective interaction in all aspects of a person's life. Strong (1985) stressed the critical role of effective listening in interpersonal relationships and suggested that the area requires additional emphasis and wider recognition. Ridge (1985) has implied that the pycholinguistic areas of attention, concentration and memory can all be improved through emphasis on effective listening skills.

Several authorities have emphasized specific strategies for modification of inefficient listening behavior. Barriers to learning in the classroom were tied to inefficient auditory processing of oral directions and performance standards by Rubin (1982). Lundsteen (1979) contended that a lifetime of poor listening habits requires an in-depth approach in order for change to be expected. Overly conditioned communication habits require individualized training and deprogramming. Strong (1983) has also suggested that, during the early stages of training, the listening student must recognize that feeling awkward and uncomfortable is a natural and essential component of this major change in interpersonal communication behavior.

The importance of effective listening is being raised more often in business and professional fields. Steil, Barker, and Watson (1983), have designed a listening textbook and resource book for executive and professionals in business and industry. Sussman and Krivonos (1979, p. 117) have pinpointed the importance of listening in the employment interview. They contend that "if you're not prepared to listen to the interviewee then don't conduct the interview."

Developing effective listening habits by eliminating the poor listening habits, although theoretically sound, has some major limitations. When this approach is generically applied, the learner has difficulty determining <u>which</u> listening barriers are specific to his or her daily communication patterns. Individualized goals, strategies and mechanisms for eliminating these barriers must also be implemented. General strategies, randomly applied, cannot transform a poor listener into an effective one. Listening habits are inherent components of <u>each</u> person's individual communicative style. One individual may be an ineffective listener because he or she cannot concentrate on a speaker's verbal message, while another listener is ineffective because he or she consistently interrupts speakers during emotional issues.

We need to focus on modification of specific causes of ineffective communication behavior, rather than theorizing regarding generic symptoms. Teachers of interpersonal communication and listening must facilitate each student's identification of specific listening deficiencies, and then prescribe individualized treatments aimed at eliminating these barriers to effective communication. A strategy designed to accomplish this goal involves having each student examine his or her individual communication patterns and then combine listening principles and classroom exercises into the development of a personal "Student Listening Profile" (SLP). The SLP consists of a journal in which the student records self identified personal listening barriers, goals for improving listening skills, behavioral objectives for eliminating the specific barriers identified, and strategies for monitoring and reinforcing goal/objective-directed behavior.

Description of the Student Listening Profile

The Student Listening Profile journal and related strategies were designed to be used in college level "listening" courses, but can be easily adapted for use in interpersonal communication, speech pathology, audiology and public speaking classes. The students individually develop four-stage student listening profiles in a journal format.

Stage One: Identification of Ineffective Listening Habits

Common barriers to effective listening are solicited, identified and discussed during the initial class meetings. Students then develop a list of their personal listening barriers from these class activities and assigned readings. The final list is entered in each student's journal. Examples of personal entries include:

1. I have a problem listening to someone speak when I am distracted by an aspect of their physical appearance.

2. I don't listen in classes when the material is too difficult for me.
3. I find myself formulating a response in my mind when someone is speaking on an issue with which I disagree.

Stage Two: Listening Goal Statements

This section of the SLP journal relates the barriers identified in stage one to students' personal listening goals. Resolutions for overcoming the poor listening habits are designed incorporating a time-table for implementation. Examples of students' resolution statements include:

1. By the end of the semester I will listen to others without being distracted by any aspect of their physical appearance.
2. By mid-semester I will actively listen in the classes which I feel are too difficult for me.
3. Throughout the semester, I will attend to each speaker's entire message, especially on topics with which I disagree, before formulating a response.

Stage Three: Specific Behavioral Objectives

The third phase of the SLP involves development of more specific behavioral objectives. Each student lists at least five affirmatively stated behavioral objectives designed to eliminate each listening barrier identified in stage one. An example of the first three stages from a sample SLP follows:

Barrier: I don't listen in classes when the material is too difficult for me.

Goal: By mid-semester I will actively listen in the classes which I feel are too difficult for me.

Behavioral Objectives:

1. I will paraphrase the concepts in the lecture.
2. I will take notes throughout the lecture.
3. I will complete assigned readings before class.
4. I will sit up straight in my chair, with both feet on the floor.
5. I will sit in the front section of the class.

Stage Four: Facilitating Techniques

In the fourth stage of the development of the SLP journal, each student selects facilitating techniques for self-monitoring behavior. An action/activity which can facilitate the implementation of each listening goal is identified and later employed whenever a listening barrier is encountered. For example, a student wrote: "Each time I find myself daydreaming in a course which I feel is too difficult for me, I will change my watch from my left wrist to my right wrist for one hour."

Students generate additional journal entries by reporting progress and setbacks on the way to achieving their listening goals. In addition to these personal diary entries, classroom activities designed to facilitate general and specific listening behaviors are conducted. Examples of these activities include: simulation of listening situations, discussions of barriers and facilitators to active listening, role playing of positive (and negative) listening habits, problem solving activities, etc.

The implementation of the Student Listening Profile takes receptive communication skills out of the realm of the "theoretical" and into an "action outcome" domain which increases students' communicative effectiveness. The SLP journal is one way of ascertaining that our students "practice what we preach." It also provides an

objective means for measuring student progress in communication competency. The "Profile Journal" concept can be applied to the improvement of expressive skills as well, especially those relevant to interpersonal communication.

Students have reported both communication skill enhancement and academic proficiency improvement as a result of the SLP journal writing experience. The authors have found students exposed to the SLP approach routinely obtain improved scores on a standardized listening measure (Brown-Carlson Listening Comprehension Test, Brown and Carlson, 1955), when compared to the pre- to post-test scores of students in similar communication courses where traditional, theoretical models have been employed.

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